

**STATEMENT
OF
RICK PERRY
GOVERNOR
STATE OF TEXAS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**

**“Federalism and Disaster Response: Examining the Roles and
Responsibilities of Local, State, and Federal Agencies”**

**October 19, 2005
10:00 a.m.
311 Cannon House Office Building**

Testimony by Gov. Rick Perry
October 19, 2005
Federalizing Emergency Response

Thank you Chairman King and members of the committee. I testify before you today with a clear point of view: I oppose the federalization of emergency response efforts to natural disasters and other catastrophic events.

I say this with no malice toward the federal government or the military, which can and should bring tremendous resources to bear in responding to catastrophes.

I have great appreciation for the capabilities of our military because I served for four and a half years. I know what the military does best: their expertise is preparing for wars, fighting wars and winning wars.

The mission of our military is not that of a fire department or police department or hospital...it is not designed to be a civil first responder.

Our firefighters, peace officers and EMS personnel respond to emergencies every day in our local communities. They know their communities best, they have done the emergency training exercises in those communities, and they can respond the quickest to emergencies in their communities.

I say leave first response to the first responders, leave decision-making in the hands of local and state leaders, and leave for our military the important job of fighting wars and keeping the peace.

The idea of federalization raises many questions, the first being perhaps the most important:

If, from the President on down, we recognize the federal response was not adequate during Katrina, does that inspire confidence that a greater federal role is the solution?

If the federal government takes this over, will they perform 150 emergency exercises in Texas over the next four years, as we did in the last four years, while also tending to the needs of the other 49 states?

Will the federal government take over responsibility for coordinating with our state's twelve hundred nursing homes, and hundreds of hospitals concerning the evacuation of people with special needs?

If the military creates a special division of first responders, will we have highly trained, well-equipped federal troops unavailable for duty overseas as they wait for an emergency large enough for their activation? Would this not turn them into the equivalent of the Military Maytag

Repairman, waiting for the call when emergency strikes at home, but underutilized as part of our main military mission at home and abroad?

First responders must train together because they respond together. When you add a new layer of bureaucracy, decision-making becomes paralyzed, decisions are placed in the hands of those who know less about the community, and miscommunication becomes rampant as lives hang in the balance.

Think about it this way: when you call 911 because your loved one's life is on the line, do you want an operator who knows your community, or do you want someone at a switchboard in Washington, D.C.?

The military's most vital role in a disaster is to provide specialized heavy equipment and aviation assets and the personnel to operate them.

The lesson of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita is that while federal resources are very important, no state or local community should wait on the federal government to act. **WE** are responsible for the safety of our own citizens before and after a natural disaster, and **WE** are responsible for creating detailed emergency response plans and testing them.

In Texas, we ran into challenges and had to adapt to unforeseen events. But most important to our response is that we had a clear chain of command, we had responsible local leadership, we had tested our capabilities during training exercises, and we implemented a plan that did not depend on the federal bureaucracy's execution. Because of that, and despite the challenges that remain, I would call the Texas response to both hurricanes a success.

In conclusion, the discussion of federalizing emergency response makes me wonder what local leaders like Port Arthur Mayor Oscar Ortiz, or Woodville Mayor Jimmie Cooley, would say if they were told the federal government would lead the response to the next major hurricane. I think they would tell you give us your resources and manpower, but let Texans run Texas.

It would be a great mistake to do otherwise. Thank you.

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